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(54) Coin-freed gaming machine

(57) In a "fruit machine" which displays the rotating reels 13a, 13b, 13c on a television screen 12, a player with a losing combination may be

granted a random chance to move a replacement symbol step-by-step along the screen to replace one or other of the "reel" symbols. If successful at this, he can then either collect his winning or gamble upon increasing it.

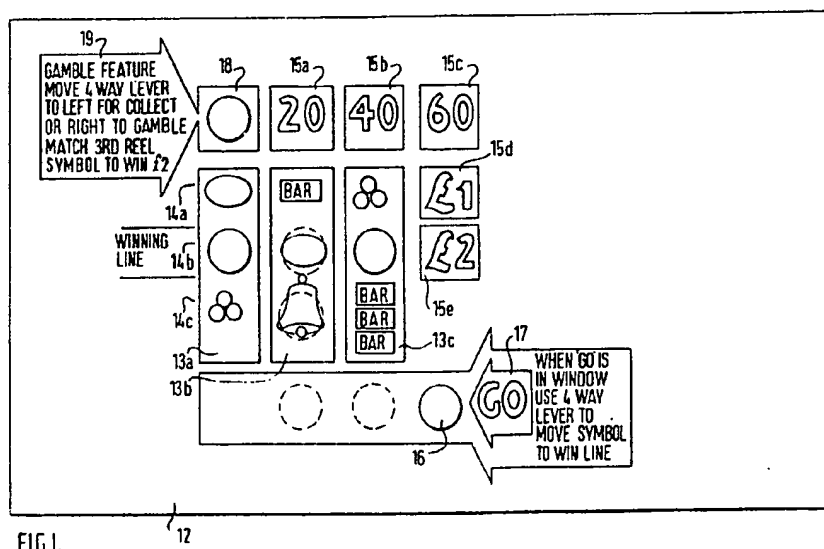
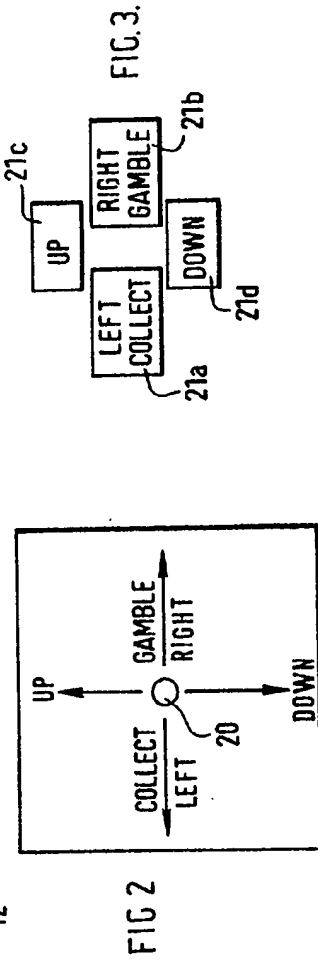
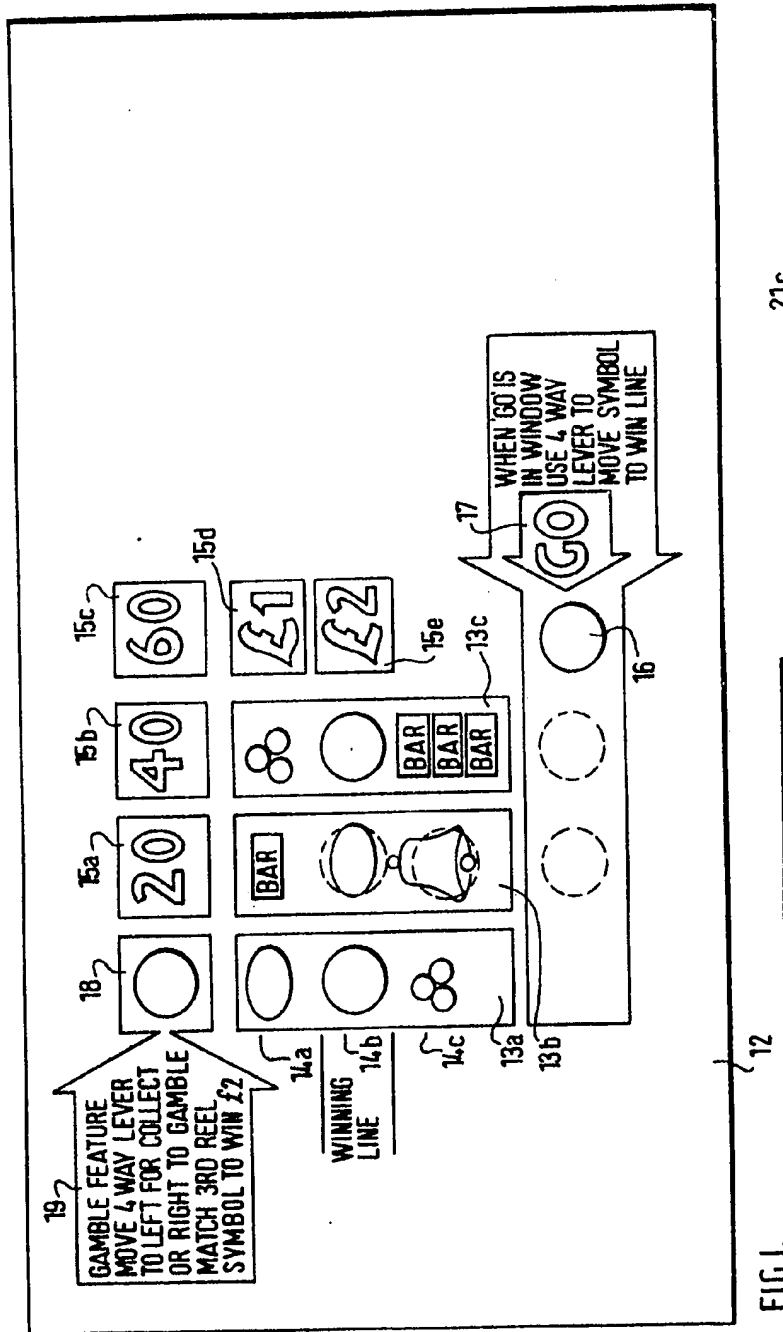


FIG. 1.

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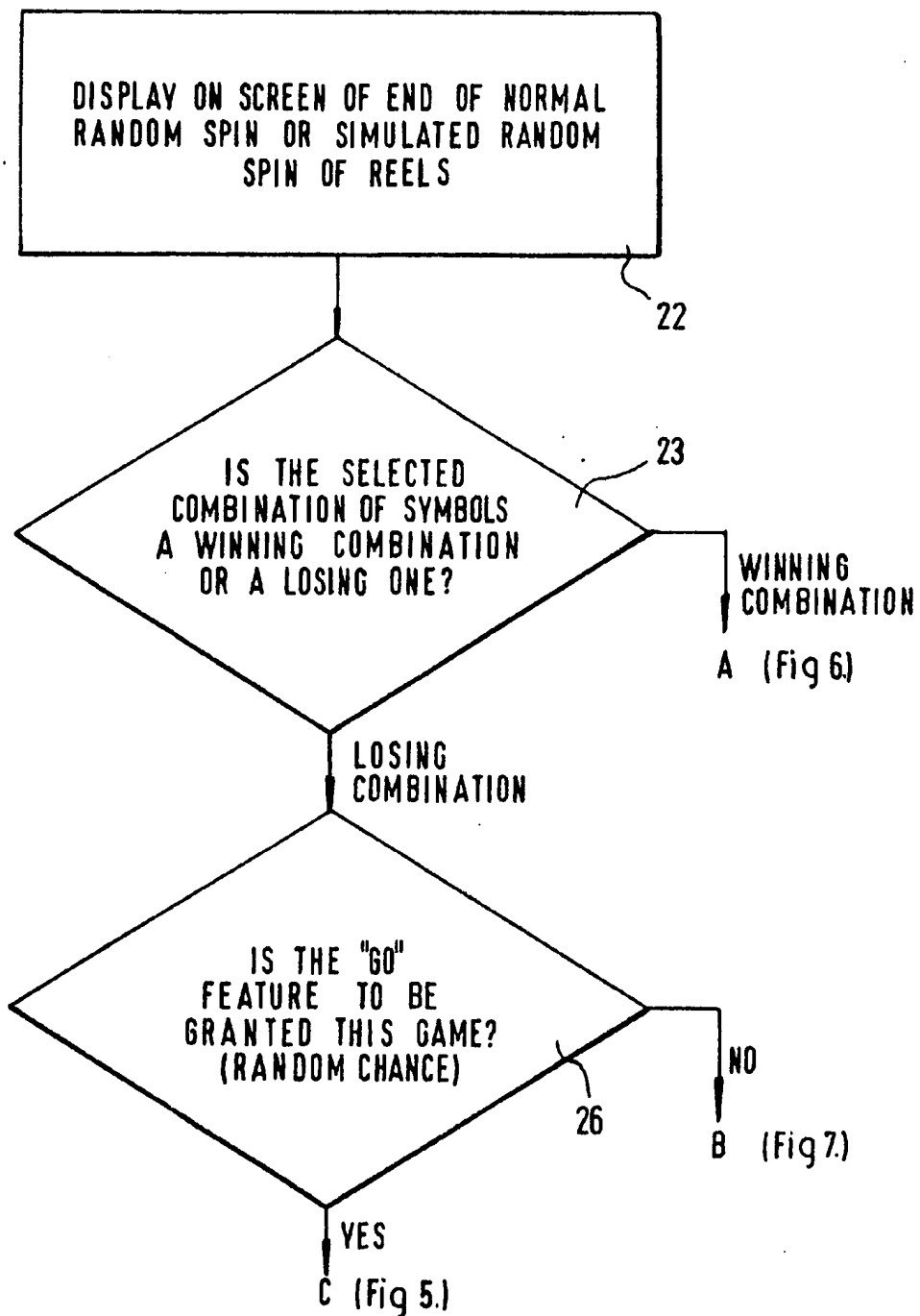
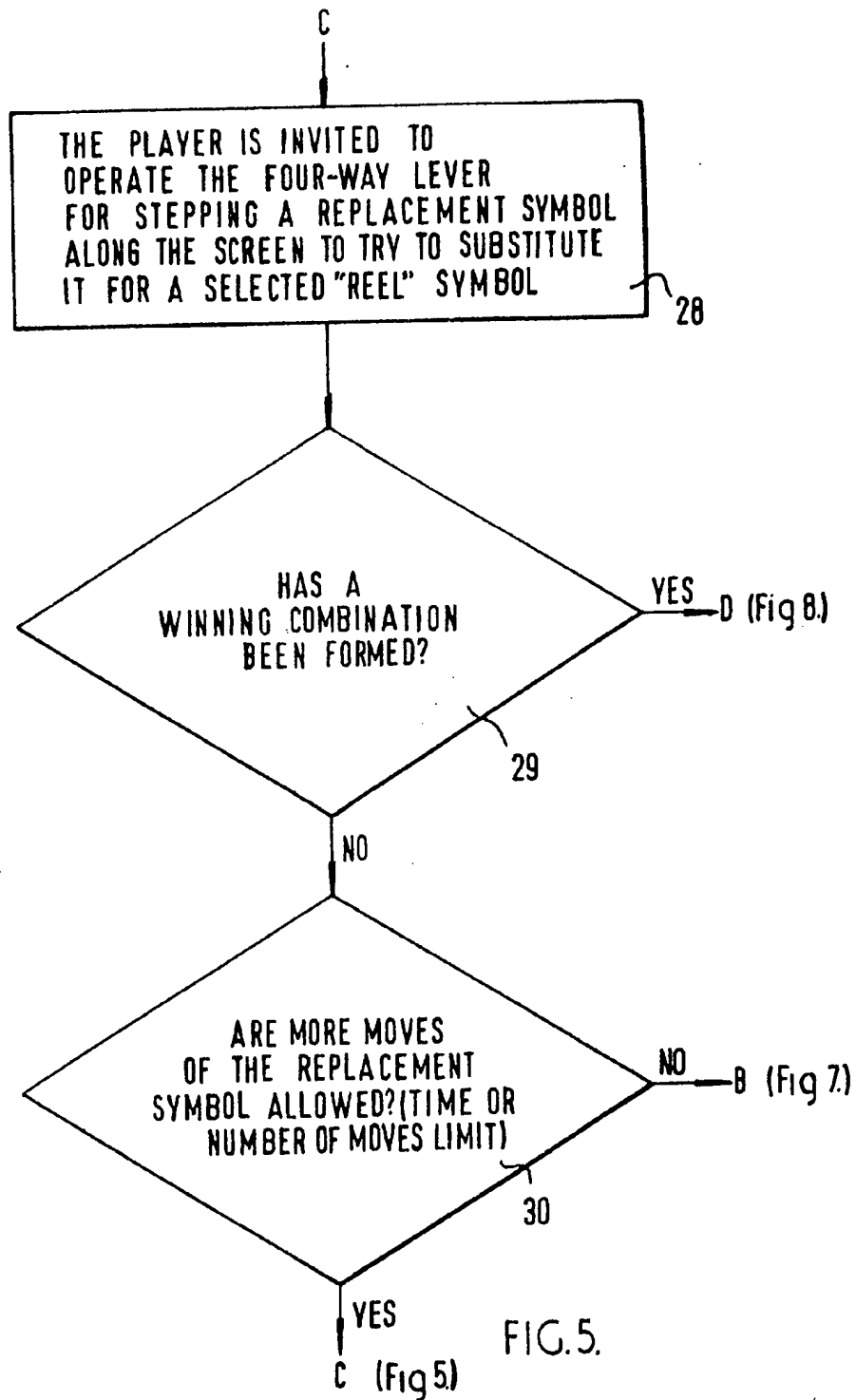
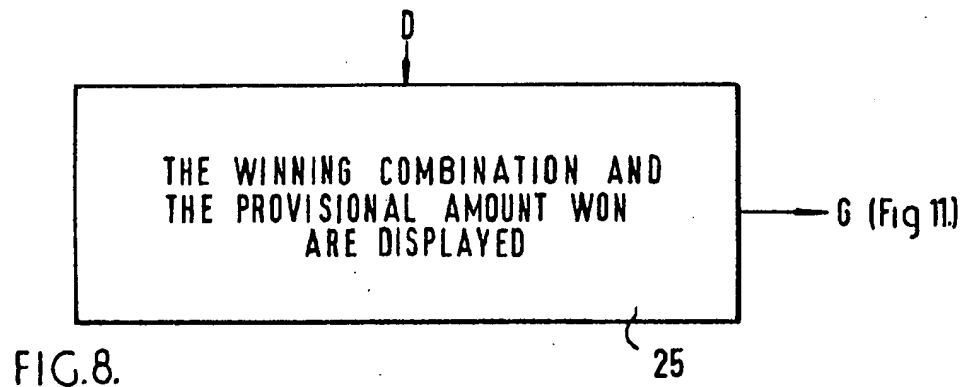
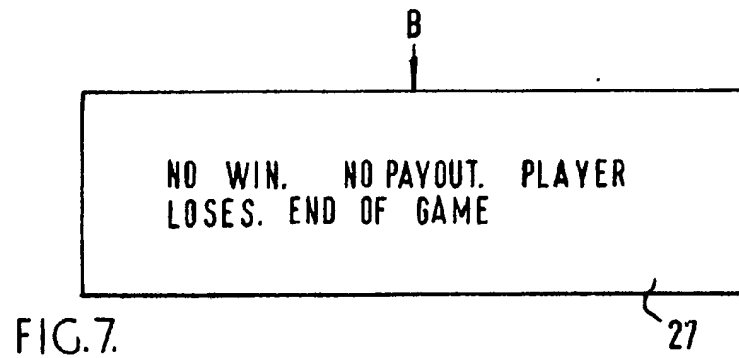
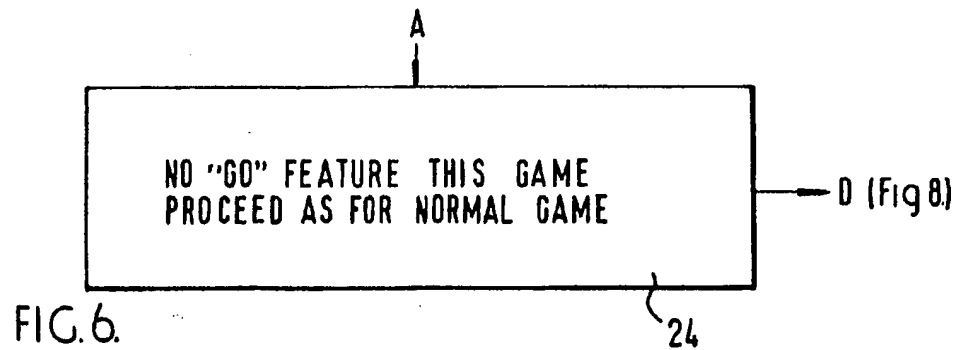


FIG. 4.





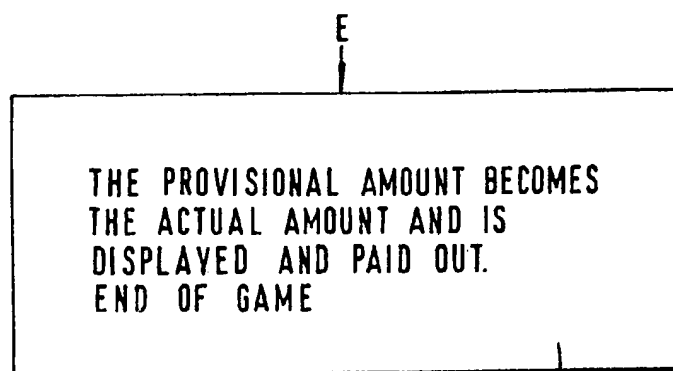


FIG.9.

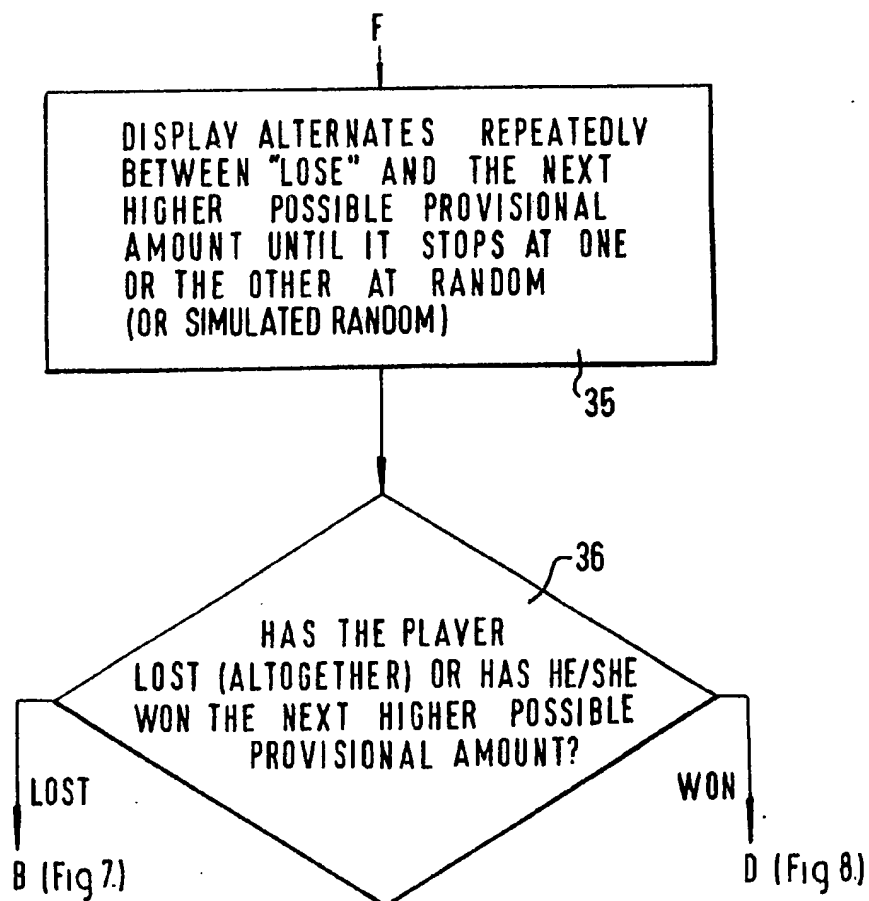


FIG 10

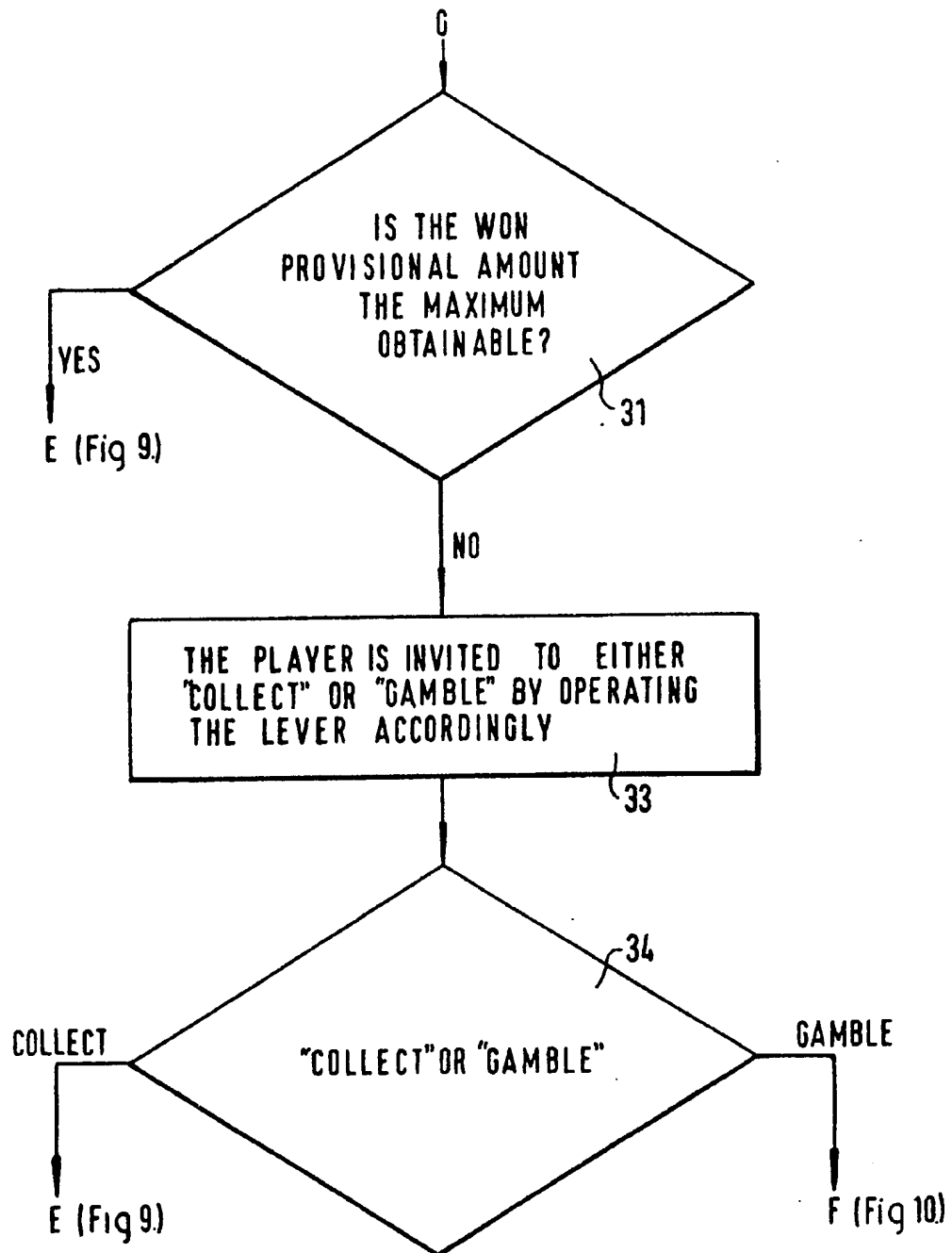


FIG. II.

SPECIFICATION

Coin-freed gaming machine

Description

This invention relates to a coin-freed gaming machine of the type comprising first means defining a plurality of separate series of symbols and second means operative to select any symbol from each series and to display the combination of selected symbols from said plurality of series.

In a known and widely used exemplary machine of this type said first means takes the form of a plurality of rotatable reels or drums, said second means operates by rotating the reels or drums to positions in which the selected symbols are visible through a window, and many (if not all) of the symbols are pictures of various fruits, as a result of which the exemplary machine has become known colloquially as a "fruit machine".

The object of the invention is to enable a machine of such a type to present a player with a chance of improving the result of a game.

As seen from one aspect of the invention there is provided a coin-freed gaming machine comprising first means defining a plurality of separate series of symbols, second means operative to select at least one symbol from each series in a random or simulated random manner and to display all of the selected symbols in combination on a screen, third means predefining some predetermined combinations of symbols as winning combinations and other combinations as losing combinations, fourth means operative to determine whether a selected combination is a winning combination or a losing combination, and fifth means operative on some but not all of the occasions that a losing combination is selected to enable the losing combination to be changed to a winning combination, the operative occasions being determined in a random or simulated random manner, said fifth means being characterised in that it comprises sixth means to display on the screen, initially in a position spaced apart from the selected symbols, another symbol such that, if substituted for one of the selected symbols, the losing combination would be changed to a winning combination, and seventh means operable by the player for moving the position of said other symbol on the screen in directions selected by the player such that, if said seventh means is operated correctly by the player, said other symbol can be moved to a desired position in which it becomes substituted for said one of the selected symbols so as to change the losing combination to a winning combination.

Preferably the screen is a cathode ray tube screen.

Preferably said desired position is the actual position of said one of the selected symbols.

Preferably said fifth means is characterised by eighth means operative, in the event of a winning combination being obtained, to provide the player with a choice between either collecting a reward of a certain value or gambling upon increasing the value of the reward with the chance of decreasing

the value of the reward.

Preferably said eighth means is operative in the event of the value of the reward being increased to provide the player with a further choice between either collecting the reward of the increased value or gambling upon still further increasing the value of the reward with the chance of decreasing the value of the reward.

Preferably the decrease in the value of the reward is to zero.

Preferably said sixth means is operative to select said other symbol from a respective series of symbols in a random or simulated random manner so that said other symbol will be sometimes suitable or sometimes unsuitable for changing a losing combination to a winning combination.

Preferably said sixth means is operative to display said respective series of symbols one after another in a given screen position, stopping the changing of displayed symbols on the selected symbol.

Preferably some losing combinations are such that said fifth means is incapable of changing any of them to a winning combination.

Preferably said first and second means are operative to display or to simulate rotating reels or drums which stop at random or simulated random on the screen.

The invention will be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:—

Fig. 1 illustrates the screen of a machine embodying the invention;

Fig. 2 illustrates a four-way lever of the machine;

Fig. 3 illustrates an array of four buttons as an alternative to the lever of Fig. 2; and

Figs. 4 to 11 in combination form a "truth diagram" of the machine illustrating the logical sequence of events in operating the machine.

Referring to Fig. 1 of the drawings, the machine is equipped with a television screen, shown schematically in Fig. 1, on which images are produced electronically by means within the machine in a manner analogous to the way in which images are produced on the television screens of well-known "space-invader" gaming machines.

Shown on the television screen 12 are (images of) three rotating "fruit machine" reels 13a, 13b and 13c. As with conventional fruit machines, it is possible to see three complete symbols of each reel at any one time, so that the screen can show three horizontal rows 14a, 14b and 14c of three symbols each (that is, one symbol per reel per row) of which the middle row 14b, is the row which determines, when all three reels have "stopped", whether the player has a winning line or not, as with conventional fruit machines.

The machine is provided with a conventional printed list (not shown) showing various "winning lines" of symbols and the value of the award for each respective winning line, some winning lines being more valuable than others, as with

conventional fruit machines. Illuminable signs 15a to 15e indicate awards of 20 pence, 40 pence, 60 pence, £1 and £2 respectively. Such an award may be actual or only provisional, as will be explained hereinafter.

In addition to the total of nine symbols which are visible from the images of the three reels 13a, 13b and 13c, the screen shows images, one at a time, of a series of changing symbols in a space 16 near the bottom right hand corner of the screen. In the event of a "GO" feature being granted in any particular game (grant of the "GO" features being at random or simulated random) the symbol which finally occupies space 16 (after the symbols have ceased changing there) can be made to move stepwise, in a manner discussed hereinafter, so as to become superimposed upon, and to replace, any of the nine symbols shown of the three reels 13a, 13b and 13c. The symbol shown in space 16 can be stepped horizontally beneath the three reels 13a, 13b and 13c, one step taking it to a position beneath reel 13c, a second step taking it to immediately beneath reel 13b and a third step taking it to a position immediately beneath reel 13a. When the symbol (for convenience called a "replacement" symbol) has been stepped as desired to a position beneath reel 13a, 13b or 13c, it can be stepped upwardly so as to become superimposed upon, and to replace, the lowest symbol — in row 14c — after one step, the middle symbol — in row 14b — after another step and the highest symbol — in row 14a — after a third step. There is a maximum number of steps allowed in any one game (for example five steps) preferably just, but only just, sufficient for the replacement symbol to replace the middle symbol in row 14b of the left hand reel 13a. If (with a maximum of five steps) it is moved to replace the middle symbol in row 14b of the middle reel 13b, the player has one step in hand, whilst if the replacement symbol is moved correctly to replace the middle symbol in row 14b of the right hand reel 13c, the player will have two steps in hand and can afford to overshoot the position (so that the replacement symbol accidentally moves to replace the highest symbol in row 14a of the right hand reel 13c) and bring the symbol back to the middle row, using up the full quota of five steps in the process. Hence if, for example (as shown) it happens that the left hand and right hand symbols in row 14b (of reels 13a and 13c) are oranges and the replacement symbol shown in space 16 is also an orange (a line of three oranges being a winning line) but the middle symbol in row 14b of reel 13b is not an orange, so that the reels are actually showing a losing line, the player is able, if fortunate enough to be granted the "GO" feature, to step the orange from space 16 two steps to beneath reel 13b and then to step the orange vertically two steps up to become superimposed upon, and to replace, the symbol shown in row 14b of reel 13b, so that a winning line of three oranges appears.

Of course, it may happen that the symbol which comes to be shown in space 16 is not an orange,

in which case, even if the player is granted the "GO" feature, he is unable to create a winning line even if he correctly steps the replacement symbol into the desired position (left hand, centre or right hand) in row 14b.

Another possibility is that space 16 shows the orange that (in the example given) the player requires, but he is denied the "GO" feature.

An illuminable "GO" sign 17 informs the player in the event that the "GO" feature is granted.

In the event of the player successfully creating a winning line, with or without the "GO" feature (that is to say, either as a result of the images of the three reels 13a, 13b, 13c stopping in positions required to produce a winning line 14b or as a result of successful use of the "GO" feature producing a winning line 14b) a "GAMBLE OR COLLECT" feature becomes operative. When this happens, a space 18 at or near the top left hand corner of the screen is made to reproduce an image of the same symbol as the right hand symbol in row 14b of reel 13c and a sign 19 becomes illuminated to indicate to the player that he must choose between collecting the award shown (by illumination of one of the signs 15a to 15e) for the winning line or gambling upon increasing the award. At this stage, the award is provisional and is not actually paid out. If the player chooses to collect the award, the provisional amount becomes the actual amount and the machine pays it out, as with a conventional fruit machine. If the player chooses to gamble, assuming that he has not won the highest award of £2, then the symbol shown in space 18 jumps backward and forwards between the space 18 on the one hand and the sign appertaining to the next highest award to the provisional award. For example, if the winning line obtained by moving the replacement symbol into the right place in row 14b corresponds to a provisional award of 40 pence, shown by illumination of sign 15b, and the player chooses to gamble, the symbol shown in space 18 jumps backwards and forwards between the space 18 and the sign 15c which corresponds to the next highest award of 60 pence. If the symbol eventually stops in space 18, then the player loses altogether and does not even obtain the provisional award corresponding to the winning line. If the gamble succeeds, the sign 15c stays on and the provisional award becomes 60 pence, whereupon the player can again choose between collecting it or gambling for a still higher award of £1 (sign 15d). Again, as previously, the player may lose altogether or may succeed in making the provisional award the sum of £1, whereupon he again has the choice between collecting the award of £1 or gambling for the highest award of £2. Further description of playing a game on the machine is given below with reference to Figs. 4 to 11.

Referring to Fig. 2, there is shown a four way lever 20 which can be moved (against a centre-spring return-means, not shown) to the left or right or up or down. The lever 20 is used for stepping the replacement symbol from space 16